

Doc attacks 'Barfboro' ski challenge

says cig makers direct ad effort at kids through sporting events

by Mark Huffman

When Dr Alan Blum wanted to make a point about sponsorship of sports events by tobacco and alcohol sellers, he invented the "Emphysema Slims Tennis Tournament."

When Miller Lite advertised its sponsorship of a Who concert for more than a year with the slogan "We're Having A Party," Blum printed T-shirts for "Killer Lite" with the slogan "We're Pushing A Drug."

Now his sights are set on an Aspen event, the Danny Sullivan Marlboro Celebrity Ski Challenge, being held today and Friday on Aspen Mountain.

Blum, a family physician in Houston, is urging local kids to "skip the challenge," and is calling the Philip Morris-sponsored event "Danny's Barfboro Cele-

brity Cigarette Sell-Out."

The target, Blum says, is the increasingly common association of alcohol and tobacco with sports events, a link he thinks instills in young minds an acceptance of drinking and smoking.

An Unhealthy Link

It does that, Blum said, by associating those things with healthy athletes who are admired and emulated by children.

"They take a big, brawny linebacker and defensive tackle and they say they drink Lite beer or link them with smoking, they take the opposite of what it does for you and make the link," Blum said. "They can't tell you about bronchitis and phlegm and yellow teeth and cancer and zoo-breath," Blum said.

"I think the kids get a gradual

association that cigarettes and sports go together," Blum said. "The Marlboro Ski Challenge is a cigarette promotion for young people, plain and simple."

Blum's interest was first spurred by his father, a doctor involved in the 1964 Surgeon General's report that linked smoking and cancer. While still

drinking and smoking as a result of such sponsorships is real. A DOC member in Jackson Hole, Wyo, Dr Brent Blue, surveyed third and fourth grade students at that resort and found they had begun to associate Marlboro as the favorite cigarette of their ski racing heroes.

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a student, Blum formed DOC — Doctors Ought to Care — which now has about 5,000 doctors contributing to his satirical guerrilla war against sporting event sponsorships by alcohol and tobacco manufacturers.

Not Considered Drugs

Blum said the acceptance of

Blum worries that the makers of beer and cigarettes have managed to separate themselves from other drugs, sidestepping criticism of sports sponsorships and ads Blum said are aimed at youth.

Blum points out that deaths from tobacco and alcohol are

"more than 100 times" that of all illegal drugs combined, but said elected officials and the business community have for the most part remained silent in the face of promotion to young people of beer and cigarettes.

Many people are saying "just say no to drugs," Blum said, but at the same time refusing to interfere with "just say yes to Marlboro on the ski slopes."

Banned In Canada

Sponsorship of sports events by brewers and tobacco sellers has been banned in Canada, and Blum said he's certain a similar law will eventually end the Marlboro Ski Challenge and all other such sponsorships in the United States.

"Eventually we will do what they did in Canada, we will say we can't have this association anymore," Blum said. "I know it will happen one day, but not without an awful, disgusting fight and with a lot of people selling out."

Philip Morris: 'shrill' doc is wrong about cig promotion

Alan Blum is a "harsh and shrill ... FAX machine zealot" who "doesn't like smoking and doesn't like smokers," according to a Philip Morris spokesman.

And his dislike is so strong that he's missed the point entirely, according to Steve Weiss, manager of media relations for the giant cigarette maker.

Does Philip Morris target youth through sports sponsorships as Blum charges? Weiss says no, and says there's no proof cigarette advertising induces anyone to smoke.

Weiss wonders if car ads makes non-drivers buy Fords, or if vegetarians crave flesh after a Beef Council commercial. He doesn't think so.

What Philip Morris advertising is for, Weiss said, is to guard old customers and stake out new customers from among the 55 million to 60 million adult Americans who do choose to smoke.

"We advertise, first, because the cigarette business is very competitive and we want to retain brand loyalty, and, two, because we want to attract adults who have chosen to smoke other manufacturer's brands," Weiss said.

He points to the declining

number of American smokers as proof that advertising is useful only when it comes to cutting up the pie, not in making it bigger.

Weiss also cites a statement by former Attorney General Everett Koop, who said in 1989 as he left office that "there is no scientifically rigorous study available to the public that provides a definite answer to the basic question of whether advertising and promotions increase the level of tobacco consumption."

Blum also ignores, Weiss said, the fact that sponsorships of events such as the Marlboro Ski Challenge is in many cases the only way athletes can compete in their sports, that Philip Morris is paying costs no one else is willing to pay.

And, Weiss said, it's not true that Philip Morris wants young people to become its customers. At least not while they're young.

"We don't want underage people smoking; smoking is an adult choice," Weiss said.

He noted that Philip Morris helps fund a program called "Helping Youth Decide" that aims to discourage smoking by youth.

Blum's idea that sponsorships equal smoking by young people is, Weiss said, "nonsense."



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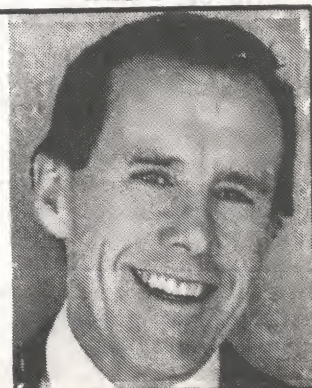
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